

Chronicle-Tribune

Suspects knock, police answer

Officers say drug dealers, buyers arrested

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October 1, 2006

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Those driving in the 3200 block of South Torrence Street during the early morning hours Saturday were greeted by a strange sight: Marion police officers and Grant County sheriff's deputies parking cars behind a home.

The officers were working with the Grant County Joint Effort Against Narcotics task force on an investigation that led to 18 arrests, many of which occurred as police were attempting to search Michael Bowlds' residence at 3202 S. Torrence St.

"Before officers could get started searching the residence the phone began ringing, and the home owner told us we could answer the phone," said Sgt. Mark Stefanatos, with the JEAN team. " ... We couldn't even begin our search because individuals started knocking on the door and visiting the residence to see if they could purchase some crack cocaine."

Stefanatos said that between the hours of 12:30 and 4 a.m., 27 people came to the house, about 15 of them carrying money in amounts from \$20 to \$250 dollars.

"It was so busy we couldn't conduct our search," Stefanatos said. "We just had officers lined up waiting for people come, and we had other officers moving vehicles behind the residence. I think we had 15 vehicles behind the residence.

"We've had (a similar type of situation) happen before, but not in this type of numbers. It was unbelievable to have this amount of people continue to come to the residence."

What made the arrests all the more strange is the fact that Bowlds' residence wasn't even under surveillance before 9 p.m. Friday.

"We were actually conducting an investigation at another location, and I followed a car that left that location and went to the 3202 S. Torrence St. address," Stefanatos said.

When he arrived, Stefanatos said he saw a large number of vehicles coming and going from the address, at which drug sales occurred, according to information police had received. Stefanatos followed a vehicle that left the home, and a Marion patrol officer stopped the vehicle for a traffic infraction. A search of the vehicle, driven by Steve Dyson, 47, 3720 Prince Hall Drive, Apt. 3, uncovered a rock of crack cocaine, Stefanatos said.

Officers were able to get a search warrant, and group of Marion police officers and Grant County sheriff's deputies went back to Bowlds' residence and arrested Bowlds, 69, and Tamika Lewis, 32, 576 S. Harrison St., Peru. Bowlds was charged with possession of cocaine over three grams with intent to deliver, neglect of a dependent and maintaining a common nuisance, and Lewis was charged with possession of cocaine over three grams with intent to deliver.

Two small children were found in the home and put in the custody of Child Protection Services, and Stefanatos said the search turned up 48 grams of crack cocaine, with a street value of \$4,500 to \$5,550. He said \$2,900 was also found during the search.

Marion Deputy Police Chief Cliff Sessoms said the arrests should serve as a warning to drug dealers and drug users.

"We just want to remind people that we are continually out there fighting the drug problem," Sessoms said. " ... We are out there basically trying to deal with the situation, and people that are using drugs and people that are selling drugs need to be aware that we are out there fighting that effort and it is our intention that if they are, they are going to be caught."

After much discussion during the 2007 budget hearings for both the Marion City Council and the Grant County Council, both approved increases to their budgets for JEAN team funding. The City Council approved an additional \$38,000, on top of the \$14,000 they usually give, to the police budget for the narcotics unit. The county council approved \$52,000 to fund a prosecuting attorney for the team, and \$40,000 to help make up for money that the team has lost in federal grants.

Sheriff's Lt. Mike Andry, who serves with the JEAN team, which is funded by the Indiana Criminal Justice Institute through the Bureau of Justice, said the arrests show just how much of a need there is for the JEAN team.

"This shows that there is a big problem out there and the necessity of this task force," Andry said. " ... This was an active house, and this shows you that there are a lot of active buyers and that we do have a problem in the community."